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SERMON DCXLIV.

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DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."—JOHN i. 1.

Eighteen hundred years ago a strange personage appeared in Judea. Forty centuries had looked for his coming. Generations of patriarchs, kings, and prophets had rejoiced in his anticipated day. All prophecy had woven itself around him as its centre. The fullness of thought and language had been poured out to describe his kingly nature and the glory of his appearance. The names of the Divine Being had been lavished upon him. To him was to be given the dominion of the whole earth, and He was to reign as David their prince over Israel, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heavens was to be his. And He was to reign with a perpetual triumph.

At the same time He was spoken of as one despised, rejected of men, a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," to be bruised for our iniquities, have the chastisement of our peace laid upon him, and his soul be made an offering for sin.

The exact time of his appearance, the place of his birth, and the circumstances, the murderous intent upon his infant life, the vindictiveness of his enemies in after years, were all minutely described. The comparatively few who would believe his report were mourned over: His betrayal by a traitor friend; his violent and ignominious death, with even the manner in which his garments would be divided by his executioners and his body would be buried, were foretold.

In the fullness of time this long anticipated being appeared. In him every circumstance recorded of the Messiah was fulfilled. His life was spent in doing good. He taught a code of the purest morals. He made religion simple and easy to be understood. He exposed the corruption and wickedness of a proud priesthood and broke their influence. The corrupt priesthood and the proud rulers of the nation banded themselves against him. With undaunted mien he braved their open attack, and to the face condemned and exposed their wickedness to the people; with matchless wisdom he met their covert approaches, and avoided the entanglements which bitter enmity and consummate artifice devised. No man was ever so hated; no one's life so exposed to the watch of foes; no man's character was so tried. And yet through his whole life, no ambition, pride, covetousness, envy, revenge, or impurity was ever even charged upon him.

His life of self-denial and God-like deeds was crowned with a fitting death. In his dying agonies he asked for the forgiveness of his malignant, mocking enemies. The same God-like spirit he had manifested in his life, he breathed out in his death. All that was noble, sublime, and beautiful, clustered upon the brow of the peerless Son who came in human form to save and bless. A character, a life and death more God-like we cannot conceive.

No wonder that upon him rested the ardent gaze of kings and prophets, as through the prophetic glass they looked down the vista of ages, and saw his glorious form! Nor is it strange that with like feelings the Christian now looks with inexpressible pleasure upon him "who is the brightness of his Father's glory," and in whom "the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily." No wonder that the christian heart, unsatisfied with gazing upon him "through a glass darkly," should often long for the time when in the presence of his Lord he shall behold his unveiled majesty, beauty, and glory.

But from admiring and loving this noble Being, we must turn to the important inquiry, Who was He? Who is this Being who possesses such matchless wisdom, such faultless character, such heavenly beauty?

Our answer to this question should be well considered, for it is of infinite moment. For our belief upon this point will determine our treatment of him. To this question two parties give answers diametrically opposite.

One party affirms that this Being was the uncreated God in the flesh.

The other party affirms that he was a mere man, or created being.

The one party *dethrones* God; the other *enthrones* man. Between these two thoughts there is no middle course. Erroneous belief, by either party, through a wicked heart, brings home to

the soul the highest crime against God—the damning guilt of blasphemy. Where so much is at stake, we should honestly seek to know the whole truth, for in following that alone are we safe.

My present object will be dispassionately to examine the question of Christ's Divinity, to disentangle it from much of the perplexity with which it is often involved, even in the minds of believers. And also clearly to set before the minds of others *what* we believe, and *why* we believe thus.

I shall discuss the subject under three heads :

- I. I alledge that he was truly a *man*.
- II. That he was more than a *mere* man.
- III. That his superiority consisted in his being God.

I. We affirm that Jesus Christ was truly a *man*. We do not mean by this that he possessed merely the form and physical organization of a man. Some have held that though there was a perfect human *body*, there was no human *soul*, but that the body was a mere instrument or means through which a superior intelligence made himself visible to mankind. Such an assumption of the human form is possible, for many times it was done by angels when they were sent with messages to men. But surely we should not call such an appearance a man, when we knew that it was an angel veiled in the flesh. It is also true that upon two occasions, at least, God himself assumed the human form. Once, accompanied by two angels, he appeared to Abraham, and as wearied travellers they partook of his hospitality.

At another time, He appeared unto Joshua as a man arrayed for battle, giving himself the title of "Captain of the Lord's hosts." By such assumption of the human form, the nature of the being assuming it is not changed. The angels still possessed their angelic natures unfettered by the forms through which they manifested themselves.

Deity was not made a man by assuming a human appearance. He was still the Eternal. That speaking eye that beamed mildly upon the father of the faithful, was still the eye of Omniscience. Through that arm that seemed only human, Almighty power poured its strength. The worship of Abraham and Joshua was then rendered him as properly as was that of Israel when gathered at the foot of the trembling mount, with reverence and awe they bowed before him.

By appearing in a human form to Abraham and Joshua, he showed that Divinity might veil itself in the flesh, and when so veiled, the propriety of divine honors being rendered him, while it destroys all argument derived from the improbability that Deity would condescend to assume a human form.

We do not mean that Jesus Christ was a man in this sense

alone. For if his was only a human form in which a superior being was enshrouded, the name of *man* to him would be misapplied.

We mean that connected with that body was a human mind or soul. And that human mind or soul was in every respect like that of all others of the human race. He was a man in the fullest sense that can be expressed. Many proofs of this statement might be adduced, but a few explicit ones will suffice.

First. This is expressly asserted: "Wherefore, in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." "Seeing then we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with feeling of our infirmities, but was *'in all points tempted like as we are.'*"

Of course, unless there was a human soul with the appetites, passions, sensibilities and weaknesses of our nature, he would not be "made like unto his brethren," nor could he be tempted like them. These passages could not apply to a divine Being dwelling in a human form. One other passage is, if possible, still stronger to establish the point. Luke says that he "increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." Here the intellectual and moral growth of a human soul is as expressly asserted as the physical growth of a human body. It proves that a created mind dwelt in that form, for it could not be said of Divinity, that he increased in knowledge and holiness.

Again, In proof that he possessed a human nature, the whole narrative of his life presents itself. At all times He assumed the attributes of a man, calling himself such, hungering, thirsting, in weariness and fatigue, suffering under all human woes. His body bled under the scourge, and fainted under the cross. His soul writhed under its load of mockery, derision, insult, and fears of anticipated suffering. He bore this accumulated burden of woe; he meekly endured every grief, and triumphed over every temptation. But it was as a man he thus endured, and thus triumphed; for it is only as a man enduring the trials of life, and triumphing over temptation that he could be an example to us.

This human soul, which was so united to a human body as the *man* Christ Jesus, had no existence until united to that infant form, it waked to life as the "babe of Bethlehem." Then as the body developed its powers, so did that infant intellect grow and expand. Its first moral character was holy, and never was its purity tarnished, while each advancement in knowledge developed new and brighter moral beauty, attracting more and more the love of his Heavenly Father. As he grew in knowledge he grew in holiness, and his excellence was shown forth in his life, gaining the approval and favor of all who looked upon him.

The apostle marks this as the growth of a man in knowledge and goodness.

II. Under our second proposition, we will show that *he was more than a mere man*. We do not mean by this that the human soul, which had just wakened to existence as the child of Mary, and dwelt in that human form, was more than human.

We mean that connected with that human soul was a pre-existent being. We mean that a pre-existent intelligence of vast power united itself with that human nature, and made its presence known through those human organs, as angels and God himself had done of old. And as angelic intelligence and power did not become human ignorance and weakness by wearing a human form, so, in this case, this superior being, by a union with human nature, lost nothing of its own exaltation.

Nor do we believe that by a union of this pre-existence with the human mind, the nature of either was changed, compounded, or intermingled.

By such union the pre-existent mind did not become a creature of yesterday. Nor did the human become changed to a pre-existent intelligence. But each, while united in one body, using the same organs, had distinct thoughts and all its mental faculties distinct from the other. Each mind acted within its own sphere as distinct in all its mental operations, as though dwelling in different bodies. The knowledge of the one was distinct from the knowledge of the other, and the knowledge of the superior became that of the human mind only as it was voluntarily imparted.

The existence and the union of this pre-existent nature with the human, I now propose to prove.

Of course, no one will say that two minds cannot be so united in one body. All that an objector can say is, that he has never seen such an union. But this objection ignorance may urge against every unknown truth. It certainly is not an argument. A very little modesty would prevent one from making his ignorance the boundary of knowledge, and denying that any thing could be which he had not seen.

We know very little about mental law. We know that we exist, and that in some way our mind is connected with the body. But what more do we know of this union? how do we know that two or ten minds might not be connected with the same body?

All that an objector can say is, that as such an union of two distinct minds in one body would be strange, he cannot believe it without clear proof. This is correct. We ought not to believe without evidence. But our belief of propositions may be demanded on different kinds of evidence. To gain a belief in some cases we ask mathematical proof. At other times we rely upon the evidence of our senses, while in other cases we must rest upon

the testimony of those qualified to give it, in whose word we may confide.

In the question before us we must rest solely upon testimony, while there are but two beings qualified to give that testimony. The one witness is the compound being who thus mysteriously exists, and who is certainly qualified to testify to the *fact* of this union of natures. The other witness is the Being by whom this union was effected—God himself. Our reliance upon the testimony of this compound being, if alone, might be weak; but if to the truth of his assertion we had the testimony of God, who could doubt?

Testimony may either be given by the living voice, or by the signature appended to another's statement. The being of whom we speak had both the voice of God testifying to his words and character, and also the signature of God, which cannot be counterfeited. God's voice, as Christ went forth to his work, commanded belief in his word: "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." And at every step he appealed to the signature of God—the power given him to set aside the physical laws. This was the understood sign of God's presence. It was the signet ring which prophets always presented, and to which they appealed when they spoke in God's name. Christ appealed to this, and demanded a belief that he was of God and his words were true. "If I do not the works of my Father believe me not, but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the *works*." Here is God's signature; believe *that*, though you do not my words.

So long, therefore, as God permitted him to put forth this power to work miracles, so long he was responsible for the words of his messenger. His last act of raising him from the dead, was God's seal to the whole life and all the words of Christ. We have, then, but to ask, what does Christ say of himself? For to all of his words is the seal affixed. To question his testimony is to impeach God. His pre-existence Christ often asserted in clear language. Once he told the Jews that he lived before Abraham: "Before Abraham was I am." The assertion was so plain, that his hearers would have slain him had he not escaped; while, by escaping without offering an explanation, countenanced their construction of his words.

Also, in that last prayer he declared unto God that he had lived with him before the world was. "Now, Oh Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee *before the world was*."

In Philipians, also, it is asserted that he took upon *himself* a human form. "Let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but *made himself* of no reputation and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." Could such language be applied to a mere man? How strangely it would sound from the lips of Paul or Peter!

Also, it is said that, through him God made all worlds, and all created beings. "God hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom, also, he made the worlds." "For, *by him* were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in Earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created *by him* and *for him*." And, again, "All things were made *by him*, and without *him* was not any thing made that was made." How could language be more carefully worded to assert Christ's pre-existence? Who could apply such language to a mere man? From this language common sense mind could derive no other meaning than that *He* who was thus strangely united to a human soul was a superior pre-existent being of vast power, who was, indeed, before all things, and in some sense, at least, was the author of all created mind and matter. These passages may be tortured to speak otherwise, but they cannot speak aught else that is reasonable.

We may now regard the two points upon which we have reasoned, as proved—that, united to that human form there was both a human mind and a pre-existent being—that these two minds, though using the same human organs, were as distinct in their mental action as in their natures. When mind and body are united, the nature of either is not changed. *Mind* does not thereby possess color, weight or form, nor does *matter* think, feel or will. Though united, the attributes of neither are intermingled or confounded—but each in harmony with the other moves forward in obedience to its respective mental or physical law. The *fact* that mind and matter are so united we believe, but the *how* the union is effected we know not, and of that we believe nothing. The *fact* that these two minds were united in one body we believe, but the *how* the union was effected we are not informed and we believe nothing about the *how*. Nor is this union of minds, though an anomalous fact, a fact any more strange than the union of mind and matter which we know in our own experience.

While these two minds were so united in one person, who was sometimes called the Son of God and sometimes the Son of Man, each mind was distinct in its own existence, with its own thoughts, its own purposes. The attributes of neither were in the least commingled or confounded with the other. This union accounts for the strange language that this being used in reference to himself. Sometimes he spoke of himself as a man—sometimes as a superior being. Now he claimed kindred to Heaven, and then to earth. It was no more contradictory than that which *we* daily use. "I am mortal"—"I am immortal." Who misunderstands it? "I am thirty years of age." "Before Abraham was I am." Is that language more doubtful in its meaning?

A belief in the two natures of Christ united in one person re-

conciles perfectly the scripture facts, and makes harmony of those many passages which would otherwise be contradictory, and no other supposition can harmonize scripture. If Christ was a mere man, how strange is the scripture language concerning him? Is not its language intended to be understood in its plain and natural sense? Could any other construction be put upon these passages I have quoted, than that before the world was he dwelt in heaven with God, and *by him* and *for him* all that is visible of matter, and all invisible, that is mind, was created? How this plain language must be tortured to make it speak aught else than that he was pre-existent!

Having, then, as I think, showed clearly from revelation the truth of the first two points: That Christ was truly a man like ourselves, with a human soul and a human body, connected with a super-human being, we come now to our third point.

III. And under this third head we propose to show that this pre-existent being so united to the man, was *divine*; and that in this union of the human and divine nature, consisted his superiority to a *mere* man.

There are not many who will insist, in the face of so much scripture, that Christ was a mere man. Such belief requires such a torture of language, or such a bold denial of the book as God's revelation, that few will take and defend the ground that he was only a good man. Most will admit that with that human body there must have been associated a superior intelligence. Some admit that this intelligence was most exalted in his nature, higher than all the angels, principalities, and powers of heaven, for he was their creator. To him such even ascribe the titles of God and crown him with transcendent majesty and glory, while still they deny that he possesses divinity and is really God. They affirm that though so exalted, yet that he is a created being and the creator of all worlds only as the instrument by whom Deity acted; that he was only the *vice-gerent* of Deity; that kingly and divine names are ascribed to him only as a compliment to his station as God's representative. Such deny his claim to be worshipped as God. Such admit that this exalted being assumed our nature, and that this union of the exalted and human nature accounts for the strange language which he uses when speaking of himself. Such admit and believe the *fact* of this mysterious union of natures, though they believe nothing and are able to tell us nothing about the *manner* of this union.

But it is the union of two natures, a superior and human, that involves all the difficulty. It is not increased by supposing that superior nature to be divine. If God could create such an exalted being, and unite him to a human soul, could he not unite that human soul to his own nature? And if He can unite himself to a human form as He did of old, why may He not to a

human soul? Who can say that such a union of the Divine and human nature involves a contradiction which Deity cannot overpass? It would involve a contradiction to suppose God endowed humanity with Divine attributes and gave to the human soul Eternity, Omniscience and Omnipotence—raising the creature to the throne of Divinity, making him a co-equal God! It would involve a like contradiction to suppose that the Eternal God made himself a creature of yesterday and then increased in wisdom and holiness, as is said of the infant Jesus. To believe that the Infinite God became a man in this sense; or that the man was God; or that the same intelligence was both man and God; or that the Divine and human attributes were commingled, or belonged to the same mind—to believe these things, would be to credit contradictions and absurdities. Such belief would confound all thought, and we may be sure God never asked it of his intelligent creatures. It is possible that some have supposed that such a mass of contradictions was the belief of those who held to the Divinity of Christ. It is certain that we are so charged. And it is against such supposed contradictions that the arguments and ridicule of those who deny Christ, are aimed.

But we do believe that this was a *union* of the divine and human nature; not a change of either; nor a confounding of the two. The thoughts, feelings and will of each were as distinct after as before the union, and the knowledge of the divine became that of the human mind only as it was voluntarily imparted. While the divine nature and the human soul acted separately in their distinct and appropriate spheres, they used in common the same bodily organs and manifested themselves through the same form, so that at one time humanity speaks of its feebleness, inferiority and ignorance; at other times with the same mouth the mighty God speaks as He did through bodily organs to Abraham and Joshua, and says unto the dead, “*I say unto thee arise;*” “*Lazarus come forth!*” declares that all hearts are known unto Him, and lays his hand as upon his own, upon the sceptre of Jehovah.

The New Testament abounds in expressions that predicate weakness and strength, knowledge and ignorance, human and divine attributes of this compound being. Why should we not understand the language, and apply it to the man, or the veiled God, as it is applicable to the one or the other?

We do not then believe contradictions when we acknowledge Christ's Divinity. When we worship him we do not worship the man Jesus Christ—but as did Abraham and Joshua we worship Deity veiled in human form. True, in our thoughts, we may not always so separate the two natures, nor is it needful; it suffices that the mind is directed to him as God.

For proof that this superior being was God himself; we might take our stand upon the *names, attributes, works and worship*

ascribed and rendered to him—for to no being less than God could such ascriptions be made without blasphemy. We might appeal to the worship rendered him in heaven, where he is associated with the Supreme Being in the praises of angels and the redeemed. But at the present time we will rest our position upon a short but conclusive argument derived from his trial and condemnation. So conclusive do we think it that we would willingly rest our belief of his Divinity upon this argument alone.

Christ was hated by the rulers whom he exposed; but was so beloved by the people that his enemies dared not destroy him by violence. When, at last, they had drawn him into their power, they sought to slay him through a judicial process. By carefully comparing the recorded particulars, we may see how they effected it. He had *two* trials. The *first* was before an ecclesiastical court, the high Priest and Jewish Sanhedrim. The *second*, was a state trial before Pilate, the Roman Governor.

The indictments framed against him in these trials were different though both were framed and prosecuted by the same persons. On the first trial his judges were his prosecutors. They hired Judas to betray, and witnesses to accuse him. The indictment charged upon him the guilt of "blasphemy"—"that, being a man, he made himself," or claimed "to be God." Witnesses were called, but no two were found to witness the same point. At last two were found who asserted that he claimed Omnipotence, but in some way their testimony conflicted and was thrown out. Could this charge be sustained his enemies could sentence him to death under the Mosaic statute. This statute, recorded in the 13th chapter of Deuteronomy, commanded death to those who enticed Israel from the worship of the true God. Could they not substantiate this charge, they must acquit him. Their witnesses all failed them, and at the last, their only hope was that Christ would confess to the indictment. The high priest proceeded, therefore, to put Christ himself under oath, adjuring him, by the living God, to speak the truth. He then put two questions to Christ. The *first* was whether he was really Christ, the expected Messiah. But, as if this was not explicit enough to meet the Mosaic statute, he added another question: "Art thou, then, the Son of God?" The language, "Son of God," may be used in various senses. Angels are called sons of God, and so is Adam called the son of God. But the High Priest meant not to ask whether he was an angel or a man, but whether he was the Son of God in the high sense charged—claiming divine honors, and so coming under the statute of Moses. He meant to ask whether Christ would confess to the indictment or no. So addressed, Christ was not to consider what meaning these words might *possibly* bear, but the sense in which the High priest used them. He could not but know he was called upon to answer, whether he was the Son of God in the sense of claiming divine

rights and honors. He knew that by an affirmative answer he would be so understood. He was bound, therefore, so to frame his answer as honestly to meet the question. Thus adjured, God called to witness the truth, he answered, "I Am." And as proof, he added, "Ye shall hereafter see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." The answer was clear and explicit. The High Priest rent his clothes, as the sign of horror at such open blasphemy. He said, no farther witnesses were needed to prove the charge. They immediately passed sentence of death upon him. If Christ had not intended the sense which they put upon his words, he should have corrected it; not doing it was affirming that this was the sense he intended.

But this court had not the power to take life, therefore, they carried him to the state court. Here they knew that his confession, as they understood it, would secure no conviction for crime, or punishment: therefore they torture his words into a confession that would make him criminal in Roman eyes. They here charge him with making himself king in opposition to Cæsar. Upon this charge he was tried by Pilate. To Pilate's question, whether he did, indeed, claim to be king, as so charged, he answered, that it was true that he was a king. But knowing the sense in which Pilate understood it was different from that in which he had been understood by the Sanhedrim, he explained himself, that his was a spiritual kingdom and not of this world. Pilate was satisfied with the explanation and acquitted him. And afterward learning from his prosecutors that he also claimed to be God, he sought earnestly to save him, but his fears of the Jewish rulers prevailed, and at last he gave up Christ to their will. The history of the matter, then, brings us to this point. Christ was arraigned upon the charge of blasphemy in claiming to be the Son of God in such a sense as to incur the penalty of death under the Mosaic statute. To this charge, which he could not misunderstand, he confessed under oath, calling God to witness the truth of his claims. Upon this confession he was sentenced to death and executed.

With these facts before us we are forced to believe one of two things: Either that that exalted, super-angelic being, who was next unto God in power and in glory, and his agent in the creation of all worlds, was guilty in the most solemn manner of asserting himself to be Divine, and claiming the honors of Israel's God,—while God, who afterwards raised him from the dead, and so endorsed his words, became accessory to his crime; or else we must believe that that being was Divinity veiled in flesh, Jehovah—God.

Who would dare charge the great God with the crime of endorsing falsehood? Who will dare deny to Christ the divine honors he claims as the Son of God?

Our examination of this subject prepares us to understand in what sense we believe the *being* who walked Judea, was a *man*; in what sense we believe he was *God*, and to see the overwhelming evidence which sustains our belief in his divinity. He was, and is, and ever will be a *man*. That human soul that began its existence as the "babe of Bethlehem," has not been annihilated. By its union with the Divine nature, it has not become God, or been clothed with a single divine attribute. It is still a *human* soul. As upon earth its powers and faculties were unmingled with the divine, but under the teachings of the Divinity within grew in knowledge and in holiness, so will it be in eternity. Under divine teachings, most rapidly will that human soul advance in every intellectual and moral perfection. Under such exalted training, fed by Divinity itself, no doubt it has already far outstripped every other created intelligence—while with still more rapidly expanding intellect, it dives into the deep things of God, and reaches out toward infinite knowledge, and yet will never sound the infinite depths of God! Though thus united and enthroned with Divinity, he will ever be one of our race, the counsellor, the instructor of his people—our *elder brother*.

Still will the divine Being, who veiled his Divinity with human flesh, wear our nature glorified. God the Son will be the Lamb in the midst of the throne, who will receive the honors and the worship of heaven.

In that glorious being God and man will be reconciled. God and man will be united. He will be the pledge for God's lasting love. He, as the representative of the race, will show the oneness into which God has taken his people, for as he is one with God, we shall be one in him. Christian friends, what awful glory do these truths throw around the cross of Christ! As we stand near the mount of suffering, we are prone to regard only human agony and human woe—to forget that Deity was enshrouded in that suffering, dying form. The whole mystery of redemption we may not here fathom, but we know that were the Lamb, the co-equal partner of the eternal throne, to lay aside the glories of heaven—to come down to earth and give himself into the hands of men and devils, to be insulted, mocked, spit upon and crucified—it would only be a repetition of the scenes of Calvary! Could we gaze upon such an awful scene and behold the dying victim?

"Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in,
When God, the mighty maker died,
For man, the creature's sin."

Well may we glory in the cross of Christ, and the gushing blood of the Son of God, that has washed away our sins. Let

us draw near with grateful love unto Him who is our life from the grave. We shall soon behold him whom we now love in his risen glory, and rejoice before him evermore.

For us, for each one of us, he trod the wine press of the wrath of God. Who of us will deny that sacrifice, tread under foot the blood of the Son of God, and count it as an unholy thing? He shall come again in the clouds of heaven, crowned with the glory of the Father, to receive his friends to himself, but to take terrible vengeance upon his despisers. Where, then, shall each one of us be found?

SERMON DCXLV.

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GOD AND MAMMON.

"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."—MATT. vi. 24.

MANY things were once regarded as impossible that are now of easy achievement. What would have been thought, a half century since, of our present modes of locomotion by land and by water? Had the idea been suggested, that man would ever plough the deep or hasten over the face of the earth by the agency of steam, it would have been pronounced impossible. Equally unbelieving would our fathers have been about the possibility of riding in the air, and communicating intelligence by lightning. But so it is. Men rise from the earth, and float about in the heavens—beneath or above the clouds, just as they please, and then return again in safety. And by the magnetic telegraph intelligence is spread from one city to another with the rapidity of thought. This is, indeed, an age of progress and achievement.

The improvement to which we allude, is not confined to the arts and sciences. *Religion* has felt the quickening spirit of the age. New methods have been devised for bringing the truth of Revelation in contact with the minds of men, and thus extending the Redeemer's kingdom. Our benevolent institutions, which are the glory of this age, were not known to our ancestors; and, perhaps they would have regarded such organizations as impossible.

There are not a few who look for improvement, not only in the means of propagating the Christian religion, but in the system itself. Or rather, they look upon one system as waxing old and vanishing away, and giving place to another in quick suc-

cession. Such persons regard the Bible as an antiquated book—no more inspired than other books—well enough adapted, perhaps, to the ages in which it was written, but obsolete now. They might possibly acknowledge that it was not too crude and coarse for the times of Richard Baxter, or the more recent age of Jonathan Edwards; but they protest against it as a book for the present day of light and progress. They do not esteem it as a sufficient rule of faith and practice, made under the direction of the Spirit of God, and adapted to every age of the world, and all classes of mankind.

Such persons might demur at the declaration of our Saviour in the text. They might say, This asseveration of Christ was, perhaps, true eighteen hundred years ago; but astonishing changes have occurred since, wonderful progress has been made in religion, as well as in other departments, and the wise have discovered how they can serve God and Mammon! If there is any truth in the maxim, that “actions speak louder than words”—if by their fruits ye shall know them, then it is clear that there are many who would fain be reckoned among this class. They are connected with the visible family of Christ, and are hopefully his friends; the world, also, they eagerly pursue, and cannot be said to have renounced it. They profess to serve the Lord, and at the same time they are not wanting in the most conclusive evidence that they serve the world. Such persons, if any, may claim to have conquered impossibilities—to have acquired the wondrous power to serve God and Mammon.

The kingdom of Christ consisteth in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. This is established in the heart of every true Christian. But many who professed to have received it, have been engaged in wars of aggression and extermination. Their brightest laurels were gained on the field of blood; and yet they are canonized as saints. If so, they served God and Mammon. Our holy religion is humane and benevolent. Its cardinal principle—its essential nature—is Love. It teaches one to love God with all the heart, and his neighbor as himself. This every professed disciple of Christ is understood to do. But how many there are who hold their fellow men in bondage—buy and sell, and treat them as cattle and sheep; and how many more that oppress and grind the face of the poor, and yet have reputation for piety. Such surely must have learned to serve God and Mammon, if any have ever made the attainment.

Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; and a wo is denounced against those who put the bottle to their neighbors' lips and make them drunk. But not a few have been engaged in this very work who were connected with the Church of Christ, and have thus been accessory to an evil that has filled poor-houses and hospitals and penitentiaries, which has sent poverty, wretchedness and wo to many habitations, and hastened millions to a

dishonored grave and a miserable eternity. If men who have done such things were christians, then they were successful in *serving God and Mammon*.

In former days the sabbath was regarded in some good degree according to the commandment. It was a day of rest for man and beast. But now a person may be professedly a child of God, and, at the same time, have from two to twenty horses going every Lord's day for purposes of business or pleasure! Such men are *helping the ungodly* in the way to ruin, and are doing more to undermine and overthrow the institutions of our beloved country, I verily believe, than all the powers of despotism and infidelity combined. If such men are christians, then they must have learned to *serve God and Mammon*.

It used to be regarded as wholly inconsistent with that sobriety and decorum that mark the christian character, to mingle in these vain and bewitching amusements to which the world are so much attached. But now we have members in our churches that love to sit at the card table, join in the giddy dance, and sometimes visit the theatre! They have discovered the art of *serving God and Mammon*, as they appear to think. They have learned how to mingle the *pleasures of sin* with those of religion, so as to enjoy them all together. It should be a matter of thanksgiving with such that things have so altered in this age of progress and improvement, that the *world and the flesh* can be freely enjoyed; and as for the *devil*, in the minds of many, he exists only in those old puritanic notions that were long since exploded. No self-denial now—*no crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts*—no painful warfare against sin and Satan—no more need of prayer and watchfulness against the temptations and snares of the world. If we keep up with the age, must we not alter one of *Watts's* stirring hymns, so as to have it read thus?—

I shall be carried to the skies

On flowery beds of ease,

Whilst others fought to win the prize,

And sailed through bloody seas.

There are no foes for me to face;

I must not stem the flood;

This world is now a friend to grace,

To help me on to God.

If this theory of religion, which some are reducing to practice, should be carried out, may we not expect revivals of an improved type? Will not our children and youth learn to *serve God and Mammon* so perfectly, that they will assemble in the dancing school one night, and crowd the inquiry meeting the next, asking with breaking hearts, *what they shall do to be saved*?

Let these things, which are growing in many churches in the city and in the country too,—let them be carried a little further,

and we shall have made the sublime attainment already reached in some cities on the continent of Europe, where under the same roof provision is made for that united service, which, in the text, is pronounced impossible. In one end a *church*; in the other a theatre. In the one place, the people meet Sabbath morning for religious worship; in the other they assemble in the afternoon, for vain amusement and the pleasures of sin. Thus they have learned to *serve God and Mammon*; and not a few in our own land are in danger of imitating this example.

It is time to take a more serious view of this matter. I cannot for a moment suppose that the members of my beloved church regard the Bible as a relic of antiquity merely, unsuited to the present age. You believe that it is the Word of God, a perfect rule of faith and practice for all men in all ages of the world. You have no idea that the disciples of Christ ever have, or ever will be able to *serve God and Mammon*. This is impossible in the very nature of things. I need not stop to show you the difference between the two masters; the difference in their service, and the different results to which it leads. You have an intelligent and correct conviction on these points. These being settled, there are some very solemn and weighty duties that devolve on all the followers of Christ.

I. They should carefully mark the line that divides the church from the world. There is a broad distinction between the people of God and all others. The latter are *dead in trespasses and sins*; whereas the former are *quickened* into life, and made *new creatures in Christ Jesus*. They have *new hearts*, and are *renewed in righteousness and true holiness, after the image of Him who created them*. Having experienced such a great and radical change, it is reasonable to expect in christians, feelings, tastes, desires, aims, and efforts entirely different from those that once characterized them. Mark then, first of all, this difference of character. It is as great as that between light and darkness—between life and death.

Running the dividing line from this starting point, you will be able to discover a difference in the *life* between the church and the world. The reading, the conversation, the pleasures and pursuits of the latter are, in many respects, very unlike those of the former. Christians have *delight in the law of the Lord, and in his law do they meditate day and night*. Sensible that for every idle word they must give account, they endeavor to have their conversation *seasoned with salt, that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers*. They remember the requirement that *whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, they should do all to the glory of God*. With these principles in mind, the christian will generally be able to determine questions that may arise respecting duty

and propriety, and draw the line very clearly between the church and the world.

There may be darkness resting upon some high hill, or some deep vale where you cannot discover the line of demarcation. But look up to him who is the Father of lights; He will scatter every cloud—in His light ye shall see light. Search for the line, for it separates between characters, interests and destinies that are totally unlike. On the one side are saints—on the other sinners. On the one side God—on the other mammon. On the one side heaven—on the other hell. As you therefore prize the soul, and its immortal well-being, strive to distinguish between the *children of this world*, and the children of God.

II. As ye cannot serve God and Mammon, be careful and exert all your influence in favor of the service of God. This was one of the leading objects for which Christians were called with an effectual calling. They can meet the world at a thousand points and manifest sympathy, tenderness and love more than ever. They can be social, cheerful and obliging; and in all show that *the joy of the Lord is their strength*. They can sustain many intimate relations, and co-operate with the world in many duties; and yet there is an important sense in which they are to *come out from the world and be separate*.

We are surely to have *no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*. Neither are we to have fellowship in any of those amusements that serve to increase the stupidity and moral delirium of the world. There is a strong tide of levity, vanity and worldliness that is sweeping away all serious reflection, all fear of God, all concern for the soul, and all sense of eternal realities. Now let me ask you, my dear brethren, what is the danger to which religion is now most exposed? Is it *asceticism*—a retired, strict, over-scrupulous regard to christian duty? Is it not rather a neglect of those duties that distinguish the child of God, and a commingling with the world that is well nigh fatal to the spirit of piety? Is the church presenting an aspect of religion that is too serious and solemn and self-denying in view of the world? Are christians spending too much time in prayer—speaking too often one to another about the things of the kingdom, and beseeching sinners too frequently and too earnestly to *become reconciled to God*? Is this the excess of grace that marks the people of God at the present day? Is there not rather a flood of worldly feeling, rushing through the bosom of the church, and carrying away much that was fair and lovely? Are we not in great danger of being swallowed up of the world?

I think I know how every fair and serious-minded christian will answer these inquiries. Be careful, then, I entreat you, how you exert your influence. Launch not out upon the dangerous current, lest you glide downward. Let your example be all right.

Let your light so shine before men, that they shall see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. Do not approve, nor half endorse these things that intoxicate with worldly pleasure, and serve to deepen the slumbers of moral death. Throw around your brethren in the church—throw around all your fellow travellers to eternity those checks, and happy influences that will tend to restrain them from the pleasures of sin, and lead them to the practice of holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

In your intercourse with the world, cases may arise in which there shall be doubt about the path of duty, or the extent to which you shall go. Such cases, oftentimes, may be settled by a few simple inquiries. What will be the probable effect on my own spirituality of mind? Might prayer and religious conversation be consistently and appropriately connected with such exercises? Will christians be improved, and sinners receive a favorable impression respecting their character and their religion; or will Christ be wounded in the house of his friends?

If the mind is not relieved, and the path of duty made plain; let the service of God have the benefit of your doubts. Do not go forward in the dark. If you do, you will fall into condemnation and the snare of the devil. You will wound your conscience, harden your heart, and bring leanness into your soul. If your brethren are in doubt about the propriety of a given course, do not disregard their views and their feelings. Serious, praying, working, cross-bearing christians, very generally entertain such views with regard to certain amusements, as have been expressed by this church and published in their *manual*. They feel that it is *wrong* to engage in them. Now in such cases we are bound to regard the feelings and convictions of our brethren, save when our own minds are free from all difficulty. In the *fourteenth* chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, you will find a principle that is applicable to all such cases. No one is at liberty to trifle with the conscientious scruples and serious convictions of his brethren in Christ. It is better to favor them, and be sure that all our influence is on the side of God, than to seek the friendship of the world by wounding the *household of faith*.

III. The highest excellence of christian character is attained by complete subjection to the service of God.

Most of those who are hopefully the friends of Christ, are frequently falling back into their former habits, that are inconsistent with their holy profession. They are taken by surprise, if not willingly, by their easily besetting sins. This is not strange, considering the many years they were held in bondage, and led captive by Satan at his will. In that long period sin gained strong dominion, and now the principle of grace, if it exist at all, is comparatively feeble.

But every one, just so far as he returns to the beggarly elements of the world—just so far as he becomes *entangled again with the yoke of bondage*, loses that sweet sense of liberty—that conscious independence and manliness of character that pertain to him when he walks closely with God, and is wholly devoted to his service. If he listens when the *lust of the flesh* cries for indulgence, and the *lust of the eyes* entices, and the *pride of life* lifts him up and urges him away after its vanities;—if he yields to the tyranny of *fashion*, and conforms to the world in its foolish and hurtful customs, he loses the benignant smile of Heaven, and ceases to hear the peaceful whispers of his own conscience. He loses the enjoyment that religion is calculated to afford, and fails to find that satisfaction in the world which it is always promising—but in vain. Such an one is pained and vexed with the consciousness of being engaged in an impossible task—that of *serving God and Mammon*. He knows he can never do it. His reason, his conscience, his experience and observation all assure him this united service is an impossibility. And yet, the heart is so weak and deceitful, and the temptations of the world so numerous and powerful that multitudes are ever attempting this very thing. So doing, their happiness and usefulness are diminished, and their character suffers.

But let a man assert and maintain his liberty by the strength and grace of God. Let him gain the mastery over himself, so that the *law in his members which was against the law of his mind*, is held in subjection,—so that his former sinful habits are subdued—his whole body and spirit are brought into the obedience of Christ, and he stands up a freeman of the Lord. Mammon, whom he once served, is now renounced; and God is exalted to the throne. His *will* is the rule, and his *glory* is the end of the christian's life in all things. Contemplate such a character as set forth in the history of the *Apostle Paul*. How lovely, how admirable, how transcendently excellent! It exhibits man in the true dignity of his nature—but *a little lower than the Angels!* To such an one we may apply the stanzas of Cowper:

"A kingly character he bears;
No change his priestly office knows;
Unfading is the crown he wears;
His joys can never reach a close.

"The noblest creature seen below,
Ordained to fill a throne above!
God gives him all he can bestow—
His kingdom of eternal love."

To such a character, dear brethren, let us all aspire; and endeavor to attain it by entire consecration to the service and glory of God.

And you who are the willing servants of Mammon; let me

entreat you to change masters. In your present service you can never experience that peace, joy, liberty and elevation for which you were made. Mammon will treat you as slaves,—subject you to hard, unrequited toil while you live, and bequeath to you nothing but an inheritance of *wo* when you die. Escape from the house of bondage, and come to the land of the free. Break the yoke of sin, and take the yoke of Christ. You will find it easy, and the burden light. You shall have the *liberty of the sons of God* now, and their glorious kingdom hereafter.

HYMN.

Be thou, O Lord, my treasure here,
And fix my thoughts above;
Unveil thy glories to my view,
And bid me taste thy love.

The world how mean, with all its store,
Compared with thee, my Lord!
Its vain and fleeting joys how few!
How little they afford!

The goods of earth are empty things,
And pleasures soon decay;
Its honors are but noisy breath,
And sceptres pass away.

Ye vain and glittering toys, begone;
Ye false delights, adieu!
My glorious Lord fills all the space,
And leaves no room for you.

—BEDDOME